



THE CALIFORNIA PRINTMAKER

THE JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF PRINTMAKERS 2018

**THE NEW PRINT:
MARRIAGE OF TECHNOLOGY
AND TRADITION**

CONTENTS

Sensing Surface; Making Sense	4
Under Siege: Strategies of Print, Preservation, & the Variable Copy	8
Technology and Touch: Intention & Serendipity in San Francisco & Reykjavík.....	12
Between the Archival & the Ephemeral; Thoughts on New Technologies in Printmaking	17
The Digitally Created Pigment Print: A Marriage of Technology & Tradition	20
Innovation in Action	23
Mark To Impress	26
The Versatile Screenprint: High-Tech Tools & Traditional Forms	30
Experimenting with Innovations in Printmaking	34
Peter Milton: Going Farther, Going Digital	36

CSP 2019 JOURNAL

About the next journal...

The topic will be *Printmaking, Politics and Society*. We invite submissions. Contact bobbroccoart@gmail.com. Please spread the word!



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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Innovations in technology influence the course of art unpredictably. For example, goldsmiths in the 1400s commonly used acid to etch elaborate designs on armor, but when Daniel Hopfer of Augsburg etched a flat iron plate around 1500, he transformed printmaking by using a fluid line to produce a printing matrix. His technique invited a spontaneity not previously seen in engraving and woodcut, allowing printmakers, beginning with Durer, Parmigianino and Rembrandt, to express themselves.

As the artists in this year's journal have shown, new techniques can evolve from traditional methods. Laser printing, 3D installation, digital software, archival inkjet, photopolymer and even virtual reality are among the techniques represented. As always in printmaking, there are many ways to develop a visual image, and the process is constantly evolving. As printmakers, one of our many tasks is to choose the best process to convey our vision.

We also want to give special thanks to our proofreading volunteer, Eva Bernstein.

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ABOUT CSP

One of the missions of the California Society of Printmakers (CSP) is to reflect the process of innovation in the printmaking community. With that in mind, it is exciting to read over the shoulders of this year's contributors as they recount their efforts to find their personal combinations of past and future technologies in their art. Membership also offers each year opportunities to participate in workshops, residencies and exhibitions.

Events so far include:

- ↪ *Thinking Outside The Frame* an exhibition opening May 18 at the New Museum, Los Gatos
- ↪ The CSP Annual meeting, May 19
- ↪ A Solarplate Monoprinting Workshop with Dan Welden, May 20–May 22
- ↪ The 105th Members Exhibition, opening September 14

The year 2017–18 has been one of transitions. Luz Marina Ruiz, who served as our president and quietly worked so hard to fill our needs, has decided to step down. We wish her well and will miss her leadership. Additionally, we want to thank all the board members who have helped support the growth and vitality of CSP. We welcome the new CSP members listed on page two, and remind them that getting involved as a volunteer or by joining the board is a rewarding way to meet other CSP printmakers.



SENSING SURFACE; MAKING SENSE

Randy Garber

For the past two decades I've been exploring how to visualize the space between silence and sound. Hearing impaired since infancy, I live in the liminal world that is neither deaf nor fully aural. Consequently, I am acutely aware of the vagaries of communication. In my prints I use traditional techniques and employ imagery that investigates perceptual variety and suggests the construction and deconstruction of language: glyphs that evoke letters; letters that morph into marks.

Important to my objective is the fact that I have long struggled with how to also materialize the work so that its very presentation suggests an in-between space (hovering between two and three dimensions). This essay explicates how the discovery of a new surface technology—Evolon—has advanced my efforts.

I discovered Evolon, a non-woven microfiber paper, two years ago at the SGCI conference in Portland, Oregon. It intrigued me because of its tough, fabric-like texture, its flexibility and its absolutely stunning ability to receive intaglio (my preferred mode of working). But that same tough, fabric-like texture and the fact that it cannot be torn also disturbed me. Long devoted to deckle edges, I thought that cutting (versus tearing) paper was an aesthetic anathema.

I had been printing on player piano scrolls (intaglio and relief) and assembling them along with their boxes into various site-specific installations.

The paper, with its mechanical cutouts, was a near perfect material metaphor for my content since the holes (the absence) indicated the presence of sound. They also, in their length and format, suggested narrative—directly related to my interest in the grammar and structure of language. To attach the scrolls and boxes to the wall, I designed and made plexiglas brackets and hanging systems which allowed me to configure the scrolls to hang away from, and parallel to the wall. I also present the print on edge, perpendicular to the wall creating the contour line of the ears in *One Last Question* and the concept of gears in *Cognitive Dissonance*.

But while the scrolls were inherently suitable for my content, they were incredibly troublesome to print on. Thin, brittle and parchment-like, the antique scrolls (some were nearly 100 years old) did not like going through the press, nor did they want to receive intaglio plates or oil based ink. When I switched to Akua inks I had a little more success getting the surface to accept the image and impression of the plate.

About a year ago, I was invited to have a solo exhibition at the Lunder Arts Center Atrium at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A beautiful, large and open space, it was an exciting opportunity, but the Center has no usable walls. All work has to either hang from the ceiling or be shown on pedestals. Up to this time, I had always and only displayed my work in relation to a wall. I installed my intaglio prints, the printed scrolls, the boxes and sometimes the copper plates themselves so that they jutted out from the flat plane of the wall. I always made and lit the work



to take advantage of shadows, which functioned as visual echoes and thus amplified my intended meaning. Now, I was faced with an entirely new installation and material challenge, and so I had to re-think what and how I would present my ideas.

How would I mechanically hang the scrolls from the ceiling and the second floor balcony? How would the meaning of the work change if viewers could walk around it and not see it in relation to a two-dimensional wall? How would I make images that functioned at a vertical distance as well as up close and at eye level? How could these scrolls, so brittle and fragile, hold up to swaying freely?

Evolon. This marvelous, new surface technology offered me a kind of playful freedom I had not previously experienced. Remembering Judy Pfaff's bold and expressive print work and Lee Bontecou's mixed media pieces, I found I could print intaglio, roll relief woodcuts, use stencils, and hand paint. I used the water-miscible Akua inks, then printed oil-based litho pronto plates and, on top of that, printed again with the Akua. As I printed both sides, I'd put a piece of fresh Evolon on top of the already printed side to get a cognate. I could fold the paper into shapes. I used plates I had made some 20 years ago, not worrying about overlapping plate marks, but rather embracing the full range and challenges of using repeatable matrices. As I did, my ideas evolved.

I was using a medium weight Evolon (it comes in a variety of thickness), and when I hung it up away from the wall (my son built a suspended pulley system in my studio that allowed me to lift and lower the prints so I could work with

them at all levels), I realized that the images from each side came through slightly on the other side. Therefore, the two sides of the paper were in direct and fluid conversation. I didn't need the wall and shadows to act as the foil for the print; I now had both sides to reflect and interact with each other. I also and importantly began to see the Evolon paper, (now cut wider than the set 12 inch scrolls) as itself suggesting the figure because of its width and length.

In past installations, I displayed etched, inked and shaped copper plates and tubes that related to the prints. With the exception of my "satellite structures" like *Listening: Receive* that had prints sewn to copper tubing, I had not attached the prints to the copper matrices. I realized that what I now wanted to do was physically embody the process of printmaking and hang the prints from the plates that made them. In puzzling out this idea, I had to consider new and complex factors that I hadn't previously reckoned with. If I was thinking about the new pieces as a continuous narrative that began with the plates and ended in the print, every point of connection, every intersection of paper to copper was a critical site for not only aesthetic logic but, importantly, substantive meaning. These linkages operate for me like punctuation marks in language, and hence the entire "grammar" of these works had to make sense. I soon realized that I could not easily make a leap from the hard copper plates to the smooth, soft paper. Inspired by the subtle, supple transitions in material in Martin Puryear's work, I decided to use shaped copper and eroded plates to link the paper to the plates: doing so would symbolize the process of etching or eating away the metal.





I have long thought about the concepts and theories on haptic visuality as discussed by the film critic, Laura Marks. Largely because of my own hearing handicap and the ways I personally compensate, I focus on perceptual process as a way to understand synesthesia and how to visualize the absence (or presence) of sound. In *Touch, Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Marks states: “I prefer to describe haptic visuality as a kind of seeing that uses the eye like an organ of touch. ... Hence the haptic: looking, we touch the object with our eyes. ... In haptic visuality the contact can be as gentle as a caress.”¹

Intaglio printmaking, with its inherent capacity to reveal delicate, small marks that require intimate gazing, is an art form that epitomizes haptic visuality. And, significantly for my purposes, Evolon, a surface that so richly reveals every type and nuance of mark, is the perfect vehicle for this visual experience.

Further supporting the connection between my concept of embodying the printmaking process and the materials (and techniques) is that the origin for the word “matrix” is related to the Latin word for “mother,” later generalized to mean “womb.” Thus, my hybrid structures show the process of the plates (the matrices) giving birth to the prints themselves. I like to think that it is the joining of technology and tradition that has conceived and delivered this new work of mine.

This new series is called *Hear/Say* and I hope it invites inquiry into both the ubiquitous discussions about what constitutes “fact” as well as our sensory processes.

Hear/Say was exhibited from January 30 through March 7, 2018 at the Lunder Art Center Atrium at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹Laura Marks, *Touch, Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, 2002, University of Minnesota Press.

Artist Information

Randy Garber, a Partner at Mixit Print Studio in Somerville, MA and a teacher at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, grew up in Philadelphia watching her father, a hand engraver, peer through magnifying lenses. Close looking and lines incised in metal are in her DNA.

website: www.randygarber.com

Image Documentation

Diminuendo, site specific installation. Dimensions variable, intaglio and relief on player piano scrolls and boxes, 2015

Diminuendo, site specific installation at Currier Art Museum. Dimensions variable; intaglio and relief on player piano scrolls and boxes, 2016

Cognitive Dissonance, intaglio and relief on player piano scrolls, 72"x96"x13", 2004, photo credit: Robert Hannan

Hear/Say, Rumor, side one, 24" x 125" x 30", intaglio, relief on Evolon with copper plates, 2017

Hear/Say, Gossip, side one, 24" x 125" x 30", intaglio, relief on Evolon with copper plates, 2017

Listening: Receive, dimensions variable, intaglio with copper tubing and binders thread, 2014

One Last Question, 84"x84"x15", intaglio, relief on player piano scrolls, 2014



UNDER SIEGE: STRATEGIES OF PRINT, PRESERVATION, & THE VARIABLE COPY

Jenn Law

In *The Custodians*, a 2016 article published in *The New Yorker*, author Ben Lerner contemplates the mandate of the Whitney Museum’s “replication committee,” led by the head of the Museum’s Conservation Department. Formed in 2008, the committee comprised of curators, conservators, archivists, a lawyer and a registrar, determines when and how a work should be replicated when it cannot otherwise be restored using traditional conservation methods. The mandate has been complicated by the acquisition of works that incorporate rapidly innovative technologies, such as 3D printing, which may require their future replication at a point when their technological media catches up to their conceptual and/or material objectives.

As Lerner explains, this is the scenario the committee faces with the acquisition of Josh Kline’s 2014 work *Cost of Living (Aleyda)*, a sculptural assemblage for which the artist interviewed a hotel housekeeper named Aleyda and then created 3D prints based on scans of her body and various cleaning materials. Kline specified that the objects should be reprinted when the technology evolves to achieve greater resolution of the printed image. In Lerner’s analysis, he makes note of Kline’s allusion to the “dematerialization of labour” in the digital age, the dematerialization of the object in conceptual art, the alienation of the working classes in capitalist society, and ultimately the work’s potential reading as a pun on museums as custodians of art.

My personal interest in this story lies in the creation of work intended to technologically evolve over time, even in the care of a major institutional collection; a work for which the copy is the endpoint (if indeed there even is an endpoint, assuming that technology will continue to evolve, and thus the work alongside it). The tricky thing about the future is that it never arrives—or perhaps the problem is, rather, that it always arrives perpetually—and thus Kline’s work may never be complete or will always be caught in the process of becoming. If the assumption here is that evolution equals innovative progress equals something better, then does it also hold to say that this work anticipates and yearns for ever-more faithful copies? Perhaps one day it will be possible to print Aleyda’s fragmented body parts using ink made from living cells—we are pretty much there now in the world of 3D printing. Does fidelity to an original (Aleyda) always equal a better copy? Is it more interesting, particularly where a work of art is concerned, when the copy remains distinct from the original, the same but different?

Print, in all its varied guises, has always been a strategy of preservation and perpetuation. In this, conservation need not simply entail the “maintenance” of an object, but may allow for and even require its evolution. After all, evolution, biological and otherwise, has long employed the variable copy as a primary means of survival and continuance through adaptation; one that is enacted over time in incremental shifts and changes. In the story of evolution, the copy is rarely ever identical.

Grounded in mimesis and multiplicity, print as a techno-cultural system has long been a critical media for producing



and disseminating information, questioning ideology, and inspiring social activism and change. Often the combination of knowledge systems and technologies is innovative. The future of print may not rely as much on the evolution of the machine—the press, the printer, the materials—as in the ways in which we think about the print.

In my own practice, I work with the “artifacts” of print culture—of reading and writing specifically. I contemplate the future of the book, our fetishization and attachment to its physical object-form, and our desire to collect and possess the knowledge contained therein. More recently I have turned my attention to the question of technology as a subject in its own right, exploring new strategies of making and thinking about the future of print.

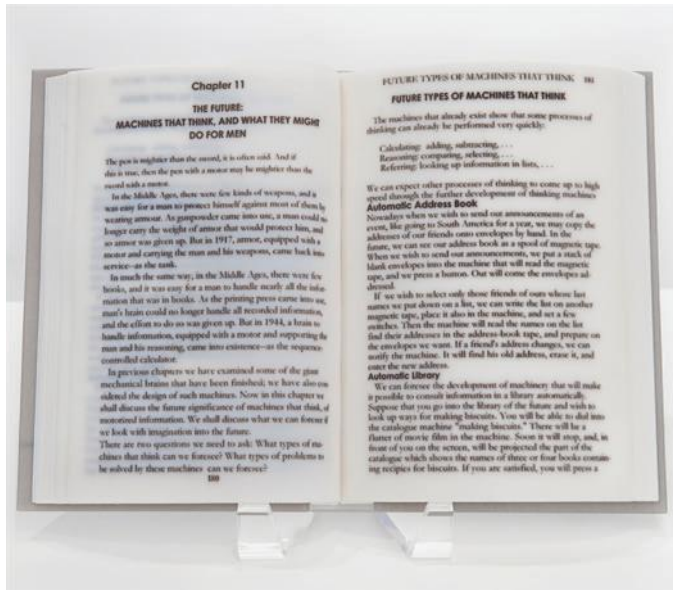
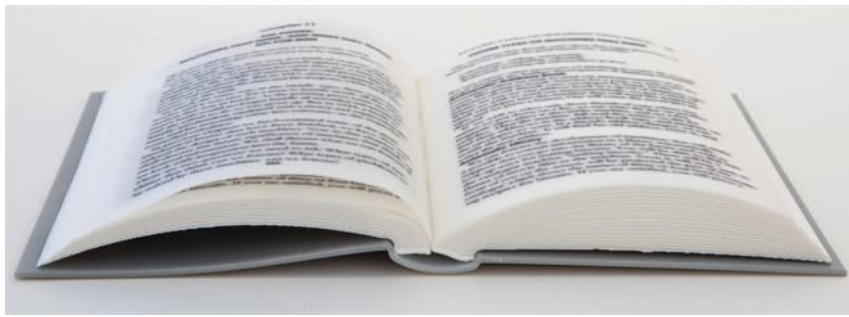
In 2014, I created two related objects—a book and a printing press—using 3D printing technology. *Artifact* is a replica of *Giant Brains or Machines That Think* by Edmund C. Berkeley, an American computer scientist who wrote one of the earliest popular publications on computers in 1949. *Artifact* is open to chapter 11, in which Berkeley imagines the social impact of computers on mankind. While *Artifact* appears to be a real book, it is, rather, a carefully constructed illusion. The top pages are printed on the surface, but do not turn; the book is open, but cannot close. Although technically printed, it is in fact unreadable. It exists solely as an art object, an artifact of sorts.

Re-Inventing the Wheel is a 3D printed, fully functional miniature printing press, designed from blueprints for a full-size intaglio press. Here, a contemporary printing technology is used to reproduce a traditional printing technology. The work is, in effect, a print that prints prints.

The plate is written in binary code, which translates to “Print Rules!” As a self-perpetuating object, the 3D printed press references an evolution in print culture that does not signal extinction but rather perpetuation.

I am intrigued by both the hype and the hope pinned on 3D printing technology to transform the way we design and manufacture things. Some analysts have even likened the rapid evolution of additive manufacturing to a new industrial revolution. Moreover, 3D printing has joined other evolving technologies in expanding our ideas of what materials can be. These days materials are increasingly ‘smarter,’ and inks may be sentient. But like all technologies, 3D printing has its limitations and its shortcomings, and it is often in the combination of old and new technologies that the most interesting shifts in thinking occur.

In 2015, I engaged two technologies that have fundamentally shaped our understanding of the world—print and horology. Indeed, the technological evolution of timekeeping devices rivals that of print technologies in its profound impact on human culture and the ways in which people think and behave. *Knock-offs* is a collection of lithographic replicas of luxury Swiss pocket watches crafted into three dimensional objects. Each is equipped with 3D printed hands and fitted with a working quartz mechanism. Relatedly, I also created a singular 3D printed pocket watch, *Timepiece*, modelled on a traditional Victorian era watch, the design of which has been repeatedly copied and widely manufactured in recent years. In the world of 3D printing, the challenge has been to create the first fully printed mechanical watch, but commercial 3D printers are



generally not capable of printing the smallest mechanisms accurately, so *Timepiece* requires a quartz mechanism to work. Like my lithographed knock-offs, this 3D printed version positions itself as both a mass produced copy and a unique artwork. As a technological object, it bears within it all the past successes of horological evolution. Nevertheless, as a 3D printed watch it remains unresolved in many ways—for now.

Resolution is often overrated, and in this realization I continue to be drawn to redundant technologies—dead ends in the evolutionary trajectory of technological innovation. In *Weep*, for example, I fitted a vintage 1938 Remington Rand portable typewriter with 3D printed ink drops and puddle, a defunct technology seemingly mourning its own obsolescence.

Pharmacy is likewise a work of mourning, somewhat differently articulated—a collection of 100 3D printed ink bottles, each filled with ash from a different book. Carbon ash is traditionally the foundation of ink, and in this, *Pharmacy* is both a library and an apothecary, composed of distilled ideas and philosophies, anticipating new narratives written from those that have come before. While book ash may infer the destructive impulse of censorship, its potential to be transformed into ink ultimately proclaims the futility of such violent attempts at erasure. *Pharmacy* is a work of loss and regeneration, speaking to the persistence of knowledge and meaning beyond the printed text.

In his celebrated tome *The Culture of the Copy*, Hillel Schwartz writes, “An object uncopied is under perpetual siege, valued less for itself than for the struggle to prevent its being copied.” Indeed, at a time when the targeted destruction of artworks, archaeological treasures and historical monuments has become a weapon in the war against humanity, the symbolic image of material culture under siege has become more potent than ever. Over the past several years, UNESCO has teamed up with the Institute of Digital Archaeology (a joint venture between scholars at Harvard, Oxford University, and Dubai’s Museum of the Future) to distribute thousands of 3D digital cameras to civilians on the ground in conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq, with the aim of accumulating a vast digital archive of images of threatened sites. It is hoped that this documentation could be used to help reconstruct and possibly 3D print replicas of lost monuments in the future.

In this age of rapidly evolving technologies and ephemeral digitized processes, new media may help us to preserve such treasures for future generations through processes of printery documentation and replication. To these ends, the variable copy—endlessly adaptive and open to change—is not a threat to the original, but rather a strategy that ensures the survival, perpetuation, and ultimately the evolution of material culture.



Artist Information

Jenn Law is a Toronto-based artist, writer, and researcher whose multi-disciplinary practice explores book culture, the historical archive/library, and print-based strategies of preservation and problem-solving. She is the co-editor, with Tara Cooper, of *Printopolis*, published in 2016 by Open Studio, Toronto, and the co-founder of Arts + Letters Press, which will be launching the journal *Art + Reading* in 2018.

website: www.jennlaw.com

Image Documentation

Weep, vintage 1938 Remington Rand Junior portable typewriter, found vintage typewriter stand (ca. 1960s), 3D printed ink drops and puddle, fishing line, 21.25" x 32" x 18.5", 2015, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Timepiece, 3D printed pocket watch with mechanical mechanism, edition of 2, 2" x 3" (16.5" chain), 2015, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Knock-offs, lithographs, 3D printed hands, mechanical watch mechanism, dimensions variable, 2015, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Reinventing the Wheel, 3-D printed intaglio press with edition of prints—*Print Rules!*, 3.5" x 6" x 8", edition of 3, 2014, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Artifact (flat view), 3D printed book (replica of Edmund C. Berkeley, *Giant Brains or Machines That Think*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949, pp. 180-1), edition of 2, 11" x 7.75" x 1.12", 2014, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Artifact (open view), 3D printed book (replica of Edmund C. Berkeley, *Giant Brains or Machines That Think*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949, pp. 180-1), edition of 2, 11" x 7.75" x 1.12", 2014, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

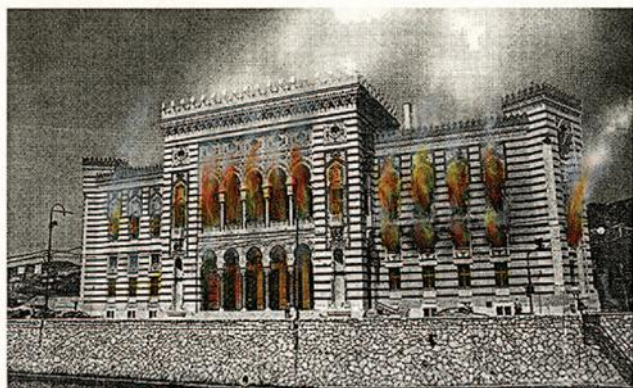
Pharmacy (detail), 3D printed bottles filled with book ash, custom wood and glass apothecary unit, 36.75" x 49.188" x 6", 2015, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Pharmacy, 3D printed bottles filled with book ash, custom wood and glass apothecary unit, 36.75" x 49.188" x 6", 2015, photo credit: Thomas Blanchard

Jenn Law, Baghdad Library (front), double-sided, 4-layer lithographed postcard with hand-colouring, edition of 20, 5.8" x 3.5", 2016, photo credit: Jenn Law

Sarajevo Library (front), double-sided, 4-layer lithographed postcard with hand-colouring, edition of 20, 5.8" x 3.5", 2016, photo credit: Jenn Law

Jenn Law, photo credit: J. Law



DESTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, SARAJEVO, 1992



DESTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF BAGHDAD, IRAQ, 2003



TECHNOLOGY AND TOUCH: INTENTION & SERENDIPITY IN SAN FRANCISCO & REYKJAVÍK

Carrie Ann Plank & Robynn Smith

Carrie Ann Plank and Robynn Smith have been investigating relationships between technology and traditional printmaking techniques within the realm of their personal work, as well as in global printmaking practices. A recent lecture by the two at the Íslensk Grafík in Reykjavík, Iceland inspired a cross cultural exchange between Icelandic and San Francisco Bay Area printmakers in relation to this space between technology and tradition. The exchange led to the exhibition, *Technology and Touch*, focusing on the variety of approaches to technology in the two disparate locales.

Both Reykjavík and the San Francisco Bay Area function as technological giants, yet in both places it is possible to feel the primitive, powerful nature of the wild. A five-minute drive out of Iceland's capital is a primordial landscape of hot springs and lava. Standing a few hundred yards from the Golden Gate Bridge, the power of the Pacific Ocean is unfurled in an unbroken vista, all the way to Japan. Does the proximity to such dramatic landscape affect an artist's use of technology? Does technology offer artists new tools to express their connection to the natural world?

The authenticity of art resides in human expression, in our ability to use tools to further our ideas. The hand refers to the individual. It is our personal mark, our connection with our humanity, our relationship with nature and the

wild. Technology is innovation; bright, shiny and complex. Since the advent of the printing press, printmaking has always reflected the relationship between technology and the hand. A mark is made, and through the alchemy of technology, that mark is transformed and transferred to another surface. That relationship is always there, from the *Gutenberg Bible* of the mid 15th century to today's laser cutters and photopolymer plates, the best printmakers seek just the right connection of handwork and technology.

Every printmaker must strike a balance between technology and touch. *Technology and Touch* explores that balance, showcasing printmakers from two cities with a striking relationship between contemporary technology and the timelessness of nature. Two magnificently beautiful cities, both technology and trade hubs, focused on the future, steeped in tradition and full of printmakers; is there a connection?

Plank and Smith's explorations connected them to ten artists using technology in a variety of ways, all committed to the power of the human touch, the mark of the hand. This is what connects these ten artists to printmakers worldwide, wrestling with new technologies while digging deeply into the time-honored traditions that draw them to printmaking. While the curators researched artists exploring these ideas, they were continuously struck by serendipitous moments. The process of creating this exchange mirrored that of making prints: focused intention meets magical moments of chance and fortune. For example, at the moment that the curators were discovering that the deepest connection between the printmakers from these regions of resonant natural beauty appears to



be a deep connection to landscape, the Southern Graphics Council International announced the theme of the 2018 conference to be *Altered Landscape*, and the exhibition was to travel to Las Vegas for the SGCI Conference.

Plank and Smith interviewed several of the artists participating in the exhibition.

Monica Farrar—laser cut relief monoprint

My work is a visual representation of the paradox between chaos and order, simultaneously resisting and embracing the constant movement from structure to decay. I focus on objects that maintain a contrasting sense of unexpected individuality alongside ordered mass production. In my work, images of everyday objects are manipulated and abstracted into patterns, textures, and interpretations of the original forms using drawing, photography, painting, and digital 2D and 3D software. The imagery is then laser cut into acrylic printing plates that can be used in various combinations during the printing process. Through the process of folding, manipulating, laser cutting, and deconstructing, I am able to resist and utilize the constant forces pulling elements from a state of order to disorder. My use of manual printing and drawing processes mixed with digital methods allows control; while using technology delivers surprising results.

Greta Mjöll Bjarnadóttir—laser cut, angle ironed woodcuts

I work conceptually without specific regard for technology. However, I am intrigued by new/modern techniques and equipment with how these things offer new possibilities of implementation/expression. For example, the *Bliss* pictures are a “bliss” of colors, harmony and stability, implemented

by fine computer controlled cuts in rough material, but the *Torture* pictures deal with destruction and are implemented with rough cuts of a large angle grinder into the exact same base material.

Jimin Lee—laser cut woodblock and ink jet

While the use of various digital tools and their applications has been a critical part of my image making, my printmaking remains closely tied to touchable, material work. In my employment of laser cutting technology, I have developed and updated the age-old woodblock print technique. With different cutting speeds and power configurations, I render the intricate tonal range of higher resolution photographic images in the recalcitrant medium of wood.

My application of the latest techniques in laser cutting technology complicates any facile truth-value normally associated with the photographic picture. Everyday realities captured in my photographic images become ambiguous and even confusing to the viewer because of the digital manipulations I impose on them. This manipulation becomes the means by which I tell my stories and inspires the reading of the digitally reconstructed pictures as realistic, even though they are fictional. While the viewer is offered the possibility of re-interpretation or imaginary renegotiation, the sense of what is factual and what is imaginary becomes blurred and undifferentiated. Realized through multiple laser cut blocks, images take on rich textural surfaces, slowing down the act of looking. What is usually unseen and/or concealed is brought sharply to the audience’s attention, inviting sustained engagement with the tactile, tangible printed images.



Michelle Murillo—cyanotype on panel

I am foremost inspired by ideas and then seek the best medium to express them. Process informs and influences the final piece. Materials have the ability to amplify content, message and meaning. Technology is often hidden. For example, *At the Golden Gate*, is a series of cyanotype prints created from photographs of the San Francisco Bay. Looking east into the bay, the images of water are the first impressions one has as they pass through the Golden Gate Bridge and arrive at the California shore.

The cyanotype photographs were taken with a digital camera and then were edited using software. The negatives were printed digitally as well. The cyanotype process developed in 1842 has been used over centuries to reproduce diagrams commonly known as blueprints. The Prussian blue of the photochemical process is befitting of the water vistas, and like nautical navigation charts the cyanotypes become blueprints of passage through the Golden Gate. Further, the diptychs are derived from one image that is mirrored to create a pattern that simulates the wake of a ship. This series attempts to place water as the liminal space in-between continental geography and a conduit for travel, navigation and migration.

How does your studio process influence the content of your work?

Laura Valentino—gum bichromate

For the images in the show, I used a medium format camera with black and white film. I like the look of film; it's more organic. If I use digital to capture my images (and I sometimes do), then I use other means to get a

more organic look, such as shooting through glass or manipulating in Photoshop, changing contrast or inverting colors. I often use images that would be considered “bad photography” so I have something to work with, to get them farther from just an exact copy.

Since the format of the negatives is square, I made a composite of several images to get the panoramic format of the *Álftavatn* piece. I split the image of *Fjaðrárgljúfur* into four parts so I could work large.

The gum process has a lot of influence on the final look. Since the original image is grayscale, all of the color is fabricated with watercolor pigments. I print in layers using the same negative for each color, but each color develops a bit differently. It is an unpredictable process, and I never know exactly what I'm going to get. It is really a lot like painting. At some point, I decide I'm done, usually after the image has been worked over quite a lot, which adds emotion. With each step, I get farther away from the original image. The goal is to portray more the feeling and power of what I saw.

Soffia Sæmundsdóttir—copperplate etching

While driving and looking at the horizon through the window, I see landscape coming near and far. I take pictures on my phone, (my husband is usually driving) and on the screen the landscape is blurry, and there are mountains that seem to be moving. I try to capture this movement with two copperplates that I repeatedly print on top of each other on a piece of paper. This creates an “out of control” touch. It is haunting and the outcome on the paper varies.



How does the physical location of your studio practice influence your work?

Valgerdur Hauksdóttir—collaged mixed media prints

The physical location of the studio does not influence the work directly. The subject matter is consistently influenced by the laws of nature, the beauty/cruelty to be found everywhere in the environment, as well as by the effect the surroundings have on each individual and on entire civilizations throughout the millennia. The artwork can be compared to a window, simultaneously peered through in two directions, outward and inward, in an attempt to sense and understand the origin of oneself as that of others.

Elvar Örn Kjartansson—photogravure

I travel a lot and work in different ateliers around the world, which stimulates new project ideas. At the end of my stay in one place I leave rich with ideas of future projects. Being in a print studio for a certain amount of time, I start to deviate from the linear working flow of the process.

How is the work in this show linked to printmaking traditions?

Carrie Ann Plank—pressure printed intaglio on wood forms with resin

Robynn Smith—solarplate etching and relief/animation

Although the artists in this exhibition depend upon contemporary techniques and technologies to make their work, ultimately, all of the works are indebted to printmaking traditions. Whether on paper, board or covered in resin, the works are based on problem solving, driven by the artist's need to materialize moments of magic, by transferring marks from one surface to another.

Has your original question been answered? Is there a connection between printmakers from the San Francisco Bay Area and the Reykjavik Capital Area?
Carrie Ann Plank/Robynn Smith

The main connection seems to be the influence of nature in the artists' environment, and the need to express that influence through the processes of printmaking. Every artist in the show gets closer to their own motivation through the manipulation of printmaking technologies and the serendipitous nature of printmaking. There is a wildness of place in both regions that is expressed in the works of these artists. Whether the artists celebrate that wildness, as in Robynn's Solarplate etchings, or attempt to tame it through ordering and symmetry, as in Carrie Ann's gridded installation, nature is there, calling the artists to the press, demanding engagement, respect and awe.

Technology and Touch

Features the work of Icelandic artists: Greta Mjöll Bjarnadóttir, Valgerdur Hauksdóttir, Elvar Örn Kjartansson, Soffía Sæmundsdóttir, Laura Valentino, and Bay Area artists: Jimin Lee, Monica Farrar Miller, Michelle Murillo, Carrie Ann Plank, and Robynn Smith. The exhibition traveled from 688 Gallery in San Francisco to Priscilla Fowler Fine Art in Las Vegas in conjunction with SGCI and then to Íslensk Grafík, IPA Gallery/Grafíksalurinn, Reykjavik.



Artist Information

Carrie Ann Plank is an artist working in printmaking and mixed media. Plank's work is included in collections including Fine Art Archives of the Library of Congress, Fine Art Museums of San Francisco, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, the Guanlan Print Art Museum in China, and the Iraq National Library in Baghdad. She is represented by DZINE Gallery, ArtHaus, and the SFMOMA Artist's Gallery.

www.carrieannplank.com

Robynn Smith is an internationally exhibiting painter/printmaker and a Studio Art Instructor at Monterey Peninsula College. Source material for her work is based upon her travels and observations. She utilizes a wide variety of photographic, print and painting techniques in her mixed media paintings and prints. Robynn received her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design and her MFA from San Jose State University. She is the founder of International Print Day in May and runs Blue Mouse Studios in Aptos, California.

www.robynnsmith.com

Image Documentation

Elvar Örn Kjartansson, *SVEINSGIL*, photogravure, 19.69" x 13.39", 2015

Carrie Ann Plank, *Data Rondures (Large Forms)*, pressure printed laser cut matrix relief on wood laser cut forms with resin installation, 32" x 52" installed, 15.5" per form, 2017

Monica Farrar, *Chaos Falls Together*, relief, laser cut, and collage on Kitakata paper 36" x 38", 2017

Valgerdur Hauksóttir, *Glympse II*, mixed media print (lithography), 20" x 21", 2017

Michelle Murillo, *At the Golden Gate I*, cyanotype on panel, 37" x 16.5" (two panels 18.5" x 16.5"), 2017

Laura Valentino, *Earth: Álftavatn*, gum bichromate, triptych, 48" x 16", 2017

Soffia Sæmundsdóttir, *Slodir II/Tracks II*, etching on handmade Indian paper, 1/1, 15" x 11.125", 2009

Jimin Lee, *Somewhere*, laser cut woodblock and ink jet printing, 60" x 43", 2014

Robynn Smith, *Returning We Hear the Larks*, Solarplate monoprint, 9" x 16", 2016





BETWEEN THE ARCHIVAL & THE EPHEMERAL; THOUGHTS ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN PRINTMAKING

Masha Ryskin

Contemporary print media runs the gamut from meticulous archival traditional prints to ephemeral installations and digital works. From variable editions to installations, printmakers today are at the forefront of contemporary art practice, often using centuries-old processes in ways no longer recognized as printmaking. What makes some of us compelled to still use the “slow” traditional processes and how do these processes influence our desire to make contemporary and ephemeral work?

When one thinks of new technologies, the first thing that usually comes to mind is technology of the digital kind. Indeed, ink jet printing, digital generation of transparencies, laser cutters and CNC routers transformed the field of printmaking dramatically, making it easier and faster to generate an image. There is, however, a yearning to both make and experience tactile work. We see that in the increased popularity of letterpress print shops, producing objects from fine art prints to wedding invitations. There have been dramatic innovations in non-digital technologies, such as polymer printing and non-toxic processes. The advent of new technologies and the push to expand the definition of printmaking lends itself to new possibilities for one-of-a-kind works and ambitious installations.

My current process involves a combination of new non-toxic and digital processes and mechanical printing on

traditional *Hanji* papers. In the intaglio prints on *Hanji*, the imperfections of the paper guide the placement and the quality of the prints. In the wall installations, both the traditional and digital fragments of prints merge with the drawn and physical collage elements to produce an immersive environment.

The potential for installation and merging of new digital and non-toxic technologies with the traditional printmaking methods is what draws me in to contemporary printmaking. I am also interested in the print process as but one component of a piece. The idea of a multiple and reproduction, while important, takes a back seat to producing one-of-a-kind and ephemeral works. The idea of print as a residue and trace of a fleeting moment in time is central in my practice. This way of thinking about the print media also leads to expanded possibilities for collaboration beyond the traditional printer-artist relationship.

The evolution of my work began with a desire for multidisciplinary practice without abandoning the key traditions and processes of printmaking. I started questioning the format of the editioned print while in graduate school. I looked for ways of combining my interests in printmaking, drawing, textiles and installation in a meaningful way. I came to the realization that the magic of the printmaking process is more important as an idea of a trace, a residue in the form of ink, that is left when we make an impression. I began then to experiment with printing on alternative surfaces. I spent a number of years printing on tea bags, combining the residue of the tea with the printed image. I used large plates and would



layer the teabags to both avoid the embossed edge and to create ghosts of images. The pieces were then sewn together in large panels, which could then be pinned to the walls or framed if need be. It was then that I began to consider the print process as a series of layered residues. The pieces were ephemeral as the tea would eat the tea bags over time, altering the image. Complementing the tea bag works, the backing paper, which carried embossed and printed traces of the tea bags, was also manipulated and exhibited. It was no longer a “traditional” print, with a beautiful embossing of the plate. The pieces were closer to textiles and indeed, much of my research involved ancient textile fragments and, to a lesser extent, remnants of Egyptian papyrus.

Over time, my process has shifted to accommodate emerging technologies. I embrace scanning and digitally manipulating the image before generating transparencies for the photo-polymer plates. This has opened up possibilities for combining text, fragments of used daily planner pages, and mechanical drawings. I kept the large plates as they allowed for freedom to reconfigure the image while using one or two plates. I have abandoned the tea bags for silk tissue paper as it allows for working on a larger scale. The residue of the tea is no longer as important as well. The silk tissue or *Gampi* paper can be folded and smoothed out at will, allowing for a great deal of flexibility in making the image.

My most recent work in printmaking involves non-toxic intaglio processes on imperfect *Hanji* paper. *Hanji* is traditional Korean paper that has been produced at the Morgan Paper Art Conservatory in Cleveland, Ohio.

I choose the rejects, sheets made by inexperienced interns in the beginning of their careers at Morgan. I look for papers with uneven fibers, those that were not separated completely or those with inconsistent thickness. Using photopolymer plates as well as copper plates etched with acrylic hard and Lascaux Wash grounds, I print on the papers while taking these imperfections into consideration. Some of the sheets are then layered while some stay singular. They are often exhibited unframed, with the air picking them up and moving them around. In these unframed works, the shadows become an important component of the image.

Modular pieces and one-of-a-kind prints allow for more ambitious projects, whether the elements are produced by digital or mechanical processes. In my wall installations, I focus on the idea of fragments making up an integrated whole. Ink jet prints on adhesive film, in addition to drawings and etchings on silk tissue, are cut out and mounted on the wall along with wall drawings and collages. The wall-size work becomes immersive and can be experienced by walking along the piece while meandering and getting lost in the images. In the piece, *Snippets*, the intimate space of a 10-by-10-foot room gave me the opportunity to work with small fragments where the viewer could examine every element very closely while being immersed in the large scale of the entire piece.

Collaboration is an important part of my practice. We always hear about printmaking as a collaborative medium. This usually implies a cooperative atmosphere in the studio or the collaborative relationship between the printer and



the artist. Having participated in print publishing projects and having had my own work published, I am skeptical of the equality of voice in this kind of collaboration. To paraphrase Kathan Brown in her speech at Southern Graphics Conference International in San Francisco, in a true collaboration both parties have an equal right to say “no.” I have collaborated with a number of artists that come from a variety of disciplines. The collaboration with printmaker Margaret Yuko Kimura is notable, however, because we are both printmakers who work with etching.

Both Yuko Kimura and I work with one-of-a-kind prints and are interested in making pieces composed of fragments. Most importantly, we are both interested in the potential of a variable matrix and the use of printmaking in a cross-disciplinary manner. Her work with handmade paper, discarded strips of matboard, shibori, and used book pages and my interest in fibers, as well as our mutual interest in working with space allowed us to employ printmaking in a way that pushed the definition of a print. Printmaking, while central to our installations, was not the first thing the viewer saw. In fact, the printed images were hidden in the works, visible only once the viewer came close enough and stayed long enough to experience the installation. At the same time, the printed imagery provided the richness and depth to the work and forced the viewer to stay longer, providing an opportunity for meditation and reflection.

We live in a time of exciting possibilities in the field of printmaking. Innovations in printmaking processes and, more importantly, in the way we consider and talk about the medium, allow for a greater flexibility and openness.

The expanded definition of the print, as well as the digital and non-toxic technologies, have provided for more adventurous and ambitious printmaking works. From laser technology that allows creation of a large number of objects in a short amount of time to mixed media and dimensional prints, printmakers are able to explore a wide range of possibilities. I am looking forward to further investigations and experimentation with the new technologies while drawing on the rich base of traditional processes.

Artist Information

An immigrant from the Soviet Union, Masha Ryskin works with printmaking, painting, and installation. Her work is exhibited nationally and internationally. She is a recipient of numerous grants and fellowships and is on the faculty at Rhode Island School of Design.

www.masharyskin.com

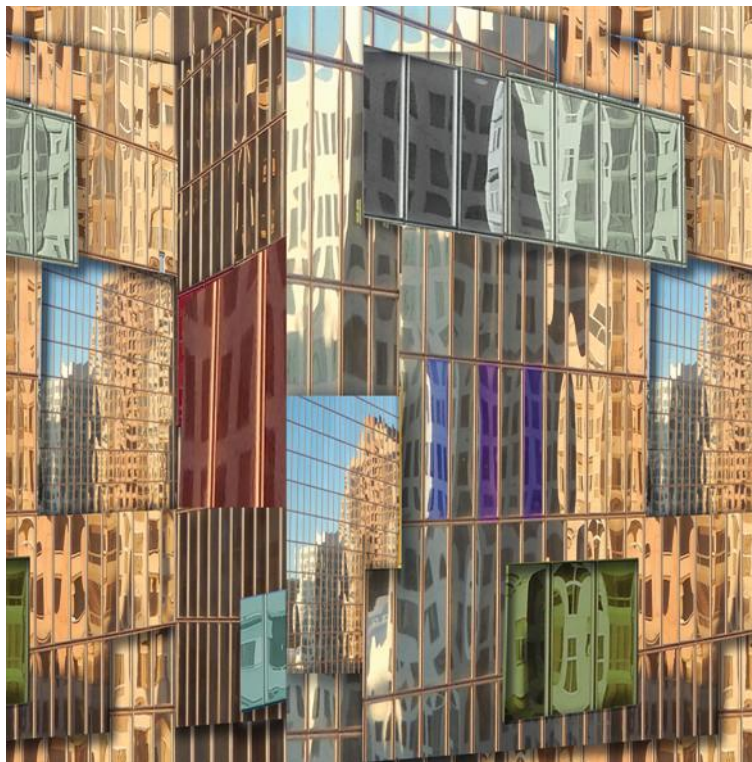
Image Documentation

Yuko Kimura, *Indigo Mushikui-Boro*, etching and aquatint and indigo pigment on old bookpages from Japan, collage, 38"x10.5", 2017, photo credit: WDPPhotography

Snippets, installation view, ink jet print, intaglio on silk tissue, mixed media on wall, 120" x 120" x 120", 2015, photo credit: Erik Gould

Layered Fragment 1, intaglio, trace monotype on handmade *Hanji* paper, 4" x 10", 2016

Masha Ryskin and Yuko Kimura, *Floating Scapes*, installation detail, dimensions variable, silkscreen, intaglio on paper and interfacing fabric, cotton, matboard, thread, 2004



THE DIGITALLY CREATED PIGMENT PRINT: A MARRIAGE OF TECHNOLOGY & TRADITION

Sydell Lewis

As an experimental painter and printmaker interested in new technology, I discovered that creating prints using art applications on a computer is a fascinating, inspirational and magical experience. It is possible to work in any painterly, realistic or abstract style with a mouse or stylus pen on a tablet or computer. Images can be viewed in multiple color combinations and deconstructed and reconfigured while retaining the original so that all possibilities can be evaluated. Digital applications take the imagination to new, fresh places and can be combined with other printmaking media as well as painting and photography. The final work can be printed with archival pigment inks on a variety of supports including archival paper, canvas, acrylic and metal surfaces. I believe prints created using digital applications are the new 21st century prints, combining technology in technique and traditional in subject matter and presentation. I call these prints "Digitally Created Pigment Prints."

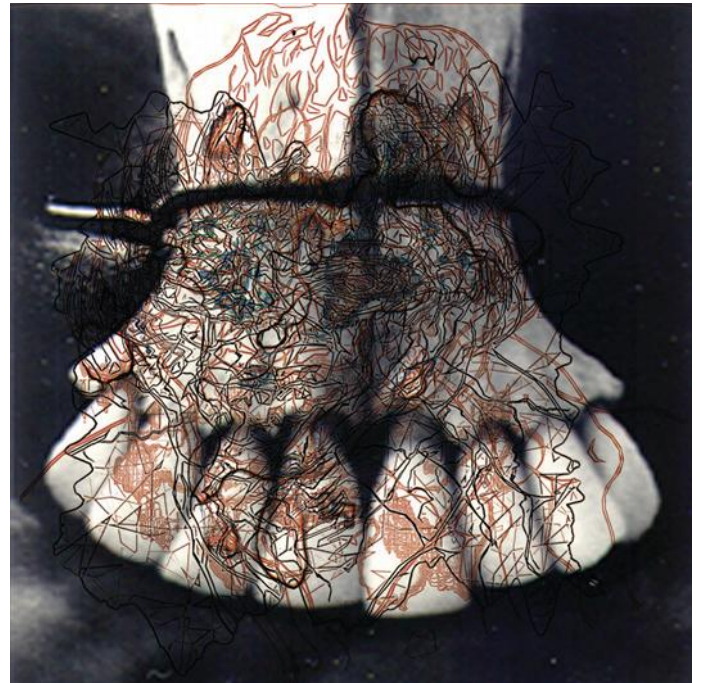
Influence and Examples

My experience with digital art started when I began working with an Epson Stylus Pro 3880 ink jet printer in 2010 using archival pigment inks. At that time, I was working with a new print technique of the late 1990s, the "Dry-Transfer" acrylic monotype. Although I did create some digital prints since that time, my energy was mostly

focused on printmaking and painting. That changed in 2014 after a visit to David Hockney's large scale digital art and iPad work at the de Young Museum in San Francisco energized my efforts to explore this media.

Although the learning curve for digital work is dependent on the printmaker's technological background, comfort and motivation, the availability of numerous art applications makes it easier to learn the basics. I am now able to create images that interest me and would never have been realized by any other means. I started on my iPad with a free application used by Hockney, called Redux Brushes. The program introduced me to brush applications and I made numerous textural abstractions that were of interest but not very satisfying. Using Photoshop on a PC, I was eventually able to produce some work that was of interest to me. For example, *Drawn to Fact* is one of the images created from an iPad initial painting, deconstructed in Photoshop and redesigned. It is part of the *WARP* series of work that explored Photoshop's "Warp" tool.

A photographic image is a starting point for some of my work since a digital camera full of images of interest is my sketch pad. I explored combining some of the photographs with computer painting. This required patiently extracting images from the photos with attention to detail to prevent artifacts which can show up later in your process and cause problems, especially in large prints. I have been working on a *Big City* series inspired by reflections of buildings from photos that I take when visiting cities. An example of this is *LA Lite*, a deconstructed and recomposed image from photographs of downtown Los Angeles.



A Brief History of Digital Art

Interest in digital art printing can be traced to the IRIS inkjet printer originally developed by Iris Graphics, Inc. of Stoneham, Massachusetts in 1985. It was designed for commercial printing to interface with digital prepress systems to produce a hard copy that shows what the exact image and color will look like before the job goes to press. By the late 1980s, because of the reproductive color accuracy, there were many artists who saw the merit in using this industrial proof printer as a way to produce high-resolution color accurate reproductions. These reproductions could be printed on various media including all types of paper, canvas and other materials and were initially called "Iris Prints." In 1991 Jack Duganne, a printmaker working at Nash Editions changed the name to *giclée*, a French word reflecting the spray process. *Giclée* has come to mean high quality ink jet archival reproduction.¹

During this same time artists and photographers started using computers to create art in new ways. Corrine Whitacker became a digital artist in the 1980s, creating two and three dimensional images. In 1994, Whitaker gave the first lecture on digital art, called *Look Ma, No Paintbrush!*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California. She also set up the *Digital Giraffe*, a monthly online art journal (giraffe.com) which, in addition to her work, includes articles, critiques, quizzes, and other writings.² Whitacker's image, *Toe Nails*, is an example of digital drawing and photography. It is based on a 35mm SLR photographic print taken in Venice, CA with digital annotations resembling scribbling. Shown in the 2015

Exposure show at the Louvre, Paris, France, Whitacker explains, "The addition of digital scribbling joined the human hand to the photographic print, turning traditional photography into a comment on abstraction and life."³

In the early 1990s, Helen Golden began incorporating computer technology tools into her photographic work. She was the first curator/director of *Art at the Pond*, which was a San Francisco exhibition venue for digital art. To create *Open*, a mixed media print, she included scans of two photographic images from film negatives, and digitally manipulated them using Photoshop, Corel Painter, and Genuine Fractals. *Open* was printed on a Hewlett-Packard wide format digital printer using HP Design Jet Printer Software and UV pigmented inks on Hahnemühle Digital Fine Art Paper.⁴

By the beginning of the 21st century, archival pigment based based inks increased acceptance of originally created digital images as fine art, encouraging artists from all disciplines to use digital techniques. These inks, some of which are durable in excess of 200 years, replaced the use of nondurable dye based inks in high end ink jet printers.⁵

In 1981, painter/printmaker Gertrude Myrrh Regan founded *YLEM: Artists Using Science and Technology*, an international non-profit arts group that continued for 28 years.⁶ She created *Gestalt*, a mixed media artwork on two sheets of round Plexiglas, with acrylic paint and carved with a dremel tool. After digitizing, the image colors were reversed and manipulated in Photoshop. A 24 inch round inkjet print was created and back mounted on a 24 inch circular piece of acrylic.



Jeanne Ichnowski is a consummate painter, draftswoman and an engineer. Explaining her emotional print, *I Cannot Get Over*, she says, “My digital photo collage combines an old photograph with photos taken explicitly to create the image. I used Photoshop to combine pieces as well as to manipulate, distort, and color those pieces. Photoshop was my drawing tool.”

Digital prints nomenclature is continuously evolving. Photographers and digital printers use “Digital Print”, “Archival Ink jet Print” and “Pigment Print” to describe their images. I choose to call my work “Digitally Created Pigment Prints” to express their technical and archival nature. The editioning of digital prints is traditional. Some artists and galleries prefer “Limited Editions” where the promised number of prints are all identical. “Variable Editions” are also created when the promised number of prints varies in size and support.⁷ There is some unease in the commercial community about the permanence of the digital file as compared to the wearing out, or destruction of the traditional printing plate or screen. Therefore, frequently “Certificates of Authentication” are issued to assure the edition promise.

Creating images by computer is the way of the future, has broad exciting applications and should be welcomed as an equal into the printmaking range of processes.

References

¹en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_printer

²en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinne_Whitaker

³from Corinne Whitaker

⁴from Helen Golden



⁵willhelm-research.com/Articles/one_for_the_ages/Fine_Art_Print_Permanence-PDN_Magazine-May_2016.pdf

⁶myrrh-art.com

⁷http://copperplatepress.com/2014/01/16/variable-editions/

Artist Information

It is no surprise that I gravitate toward the experimental and technical in my work. I was an analytical chemist participating in biomedical research until 1992 when circumstances changed and I became a full time practicing artist. I was also an amateur performing ballroom dancer which accounts for the organic elements in my imagery. Born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, I now reside in Sunnyvale, CA. My work has been exhibited in venues on both coasts and recently in Portugal.

www.sydellart.com

Image Documentation

Drawn to Fact, digitally created pigment print, edition of 20, 17"x22" on Epson Archival cold press bright, 2017

LA Lite, pigment print from photographs, variable edition of 25, size varies, 2016

Jeanne Ichnowski, *I Cannot Get Over*, mixed media pigment print, edition of 20, 12" x 12", 2016

Corinne Whitaker, *Toe Nails*, photographic print with digital additions on aluminum, unique print, 24" x 24", 2015

Gertrude Regan, *Gestalt*, mixed media on acrylic with digitized image edition of 4, 24", 1999

Helen Golden, *Open*, digital, pigment print from photographs, variable edition of 200, 1999



INNOVATION IN ACTION

Liz Chalfin and Sheldon Carroll

Established in 2000, Zea Mays Printmaking (Florence, MA) is a studio dedicated to safer, less toxic and non-toxic printmaking. We do primary research into products and practices that claim to be healthier for practicing artists. Our goal is to find the least toxic, most sustainable and most economical products and processes available for making gorgeous prints. The health of the artist/printmaker is of primary concern.

The results of our research are shared worldwide through our website, the workshops we offer and presentations at print studios, colleges and conferences.

Over the years, we have become a model for safer printmaking and have trained hundreds of artists. Portfolios of the prints created at Zea Mays are in museum, library and college art collections and we have presented at international printmaking conferences. These accomplishments are the end result of a long journey that begins with our research program and the young artist/interns who are at the heart of it.

Our interns come from all over the country as post-baccalaureate students in printmaking. We view the internship program as a way to mentor young printmakers on their path towards graduate school or working professionally in printmaking or starting their own studios and pursuing a life as an artist/printmaker. A wonderful thing happens in the studio when young artists interact with older ones and can witness firsthand how established artists balance their art practice with jobs and family.

The goal of our research program is twofold: to improve or replace a practice or product that is harmful to use in printmaking and to provide a meaningful experience for our interns. Two interns are with us for six months at a time and spend one to two days each week conducting experiments and documenting their findings under the guidance of the studio's founding director, Liz Chalfin.

Some research projects are born out of necessity. A product is either discontinued or the manufacturer goes out of business. Others are an attempt to find a safer and/or more sustainable approach to an existing process. Sometimes it's an off-chance discovery of a technique or product used in a different industry that might have printmaking applications. In partnership with the studio's director, the interns select the research project based on the studio's need and their own interests and experience.

Once the project is selected, the interns begin by scouring books and online resources to see if anyone else is doing similar research. They gather materials, contact anyone with experience, read material safety data sheets and map out the first experiments. Then the testing begins. In order to be definitive about the results of each experiment, the interns can change only one variable at a time. They document every step of the process, in writing and photos. Each experiment reveals an understanding about the process/product and brings up numerous new questions. The challenge is to figure out which questions to pursue. Sometimes the research is tedious and frustrating and moves at a snail's pace. Other times it moves quickly and continuously presents new revelations. We never

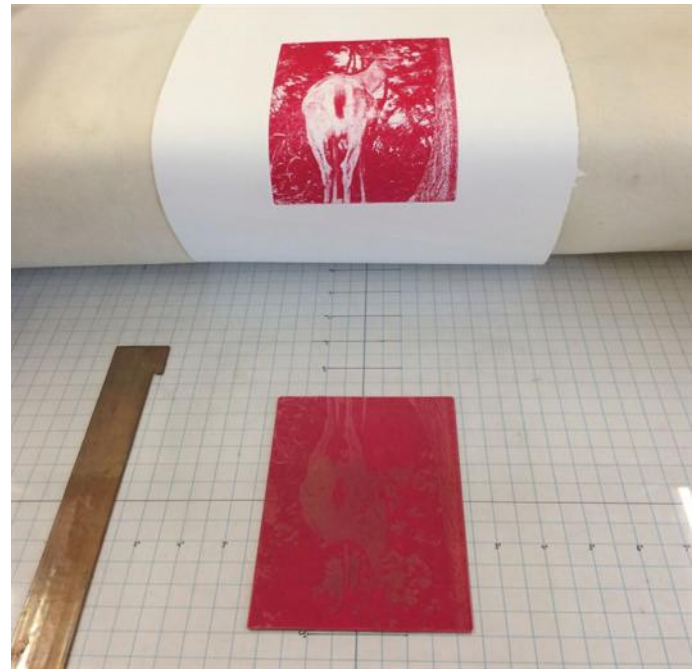


know how it will go when we begin a project. The interns become artist/scientists and experience the frustration and exhilaration that goes along with this kind of work. These research projects offer young artists the opportunity to do collaborative work, to take a scientific approach to art and to gain teaching experience when they demonstrate their findings to a curious audience of studio members. Once complete, the experiments are shared on the Zea Mays Printmaking website in detail to benefit as many artists and institutions as possible.

The Intaglio Photo Transfer project came about purely by chance. One of our studio members happened upon Technik's Press-n-Peel PCB Blue film while searching the Internet for another purpose. She wondered if there was a way to use this film in an artistic application and mentioned it in passing. We looked at its commercial application and thought, yes—this might just work as a non-darkroom photo etching process.

Press-n-Peel PCB Blue is a transfer film used in the creation of homemade circuit boards (which are etched copper). The traditional use for this film involves printing a circuit board image onto the film with a laser printer. The toner from the printer sticks to the film. The film is then positioned face down on a piece of copper and ironed. The acetate backing is peeled off leaving the film on the plate where the toner acted as an adhesive. The adhered film acts as a stop-out in ferric chloride. The plate is then placed in ferric chloride and etched. Once etched, the film is removed and the image is printed from the intaglio plate.

Press-n-Peel PCB Blue's inherent qualities as a stop-out on copper led us to believe that we could use it as a photo-based etching technique for intaglio printmaking.



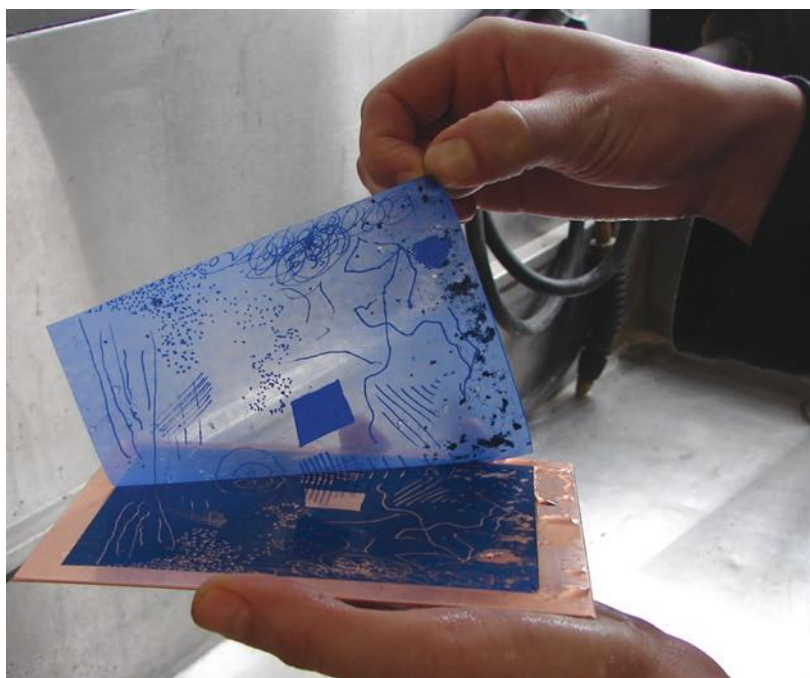
The prospect of making photo etchings without chemicals was very intriguing. We were curious to see if this material could be used to keep the tonal integrity of a photographic image intact.

We knew that the film would act as a stop out and that we could easily print a digital image onto the film. What we didn't know was how to prepare the digital file to get a range of tonalities, how long to etch the plates and how we could alter the traditional use of the product to serve our own needs. This experiment took three interns a full year to complete. In the end, we came up with a set of guidelines on how to prepare a digital image in Photoshop, added an acrylic aquatint to the process and discovered how long to etch the image to achieve desired results.

This project proved to be so successful that the interns Liz Bannish, Cathe Janke, and Stephanie Gaumond presented their research as a demonstration at the 2013 SGCI conference in San Francisco.

The Creating an Acrylic Aquatint Spray research project is an example of trying to fill the void left by the disappearance of a long used product. In this case, the acrylic hard ground made by Z*Acryl which we used in an airbrush for aquatint went to the grave with its inventor, Mark Zaffron. Printmakers from all over the country asked us "what will we do now that Z*Acryl is gone?" Our response: "We'll develop our own aquatint spray solution that works even better."

In our research, interns Jenny Gover and Audrey Blood found several recipes using Speedball screen filler as a base for a spray aquatint, as well as others that used acrylic paints and mediums. In their blog, nontoxicintaglio.



tumblr.com, Tracy Hill and Emma Gregory reference a mixture given to them by Alfons Bytautas of the Edinburgh Printmakers that combined Speedball screen filler with Future floor wax. We decided to begin with this mixture. Twenty tests and many hours later, our final formula was complete. We ended up leaving out the screen filler (it dried too quickly and clogged the airbrush) and using a variety of Golden acrylic mediums mixed with Future floor finish. This is one example of piggybacking on the research being done by other artists.

After two years of successfully using our new acrylic aquatint medium, it was time to spread the word. We mixed a few batches of the solution, bottled it, packed it and took it to the 2016 SGCI conference in Atlanta to get it into the hands of artists and teachers. At the conference, we chatted with hundreds of folks about the beautiful results we were getting, showed examples of prints and sold the bottled aquatint spray along with a companion stop-out that we created. The recipes for this aquatint spray and stop out are posted on our website for people to mix it themselves.

Sharing is at the core of Zea Mays printmaking mission and perhaps the most important aspect of our research program. Share your challenges; share your successes; share your results with the larger printmaking community, and continue to push safer and non-toxic printmaking into the mainstream. Each research project ends with the interns demonstrating for the Zea Mays Printmaking membership. Often this ignites people's curiosity and a handful of members will continue to experiment with the process in their own work, developing and refining the process. When

our faculty members become proficient in a technique, we begin to offer it as a workshop. The entirety of the experimentation is also uploaded to our website for all the world to access.

Printmaking has always been a medium in flux, adapting to new technologies and innovations. At Zea Mays Printmaking we honor this tradition by exploring alternatives that are safe for artists and contribute to the evolution of the medium.

Artist Information

Liz Chalfin is founding director of Zea Mays Printmaking and a practicing printmaker. She teaches, demonstrates, mentors, consults and lectures on safer printmaking internationally. Her own work is in numerous collections including the New York Public Library, Art Museum at Bowdoin College, Smith College Museum of Art, the Portland Museum of Art, the De Cordova Museum and Sculpture Park, The Hood Museum, The University of the Arts (Philadelphia), Yale University, Museo Internacional de Gravura (Portugal), San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts (Havana) and the Boston Public Library.
www.zeamaysprintmaking.com

Image Documentation

Press-n-Peel Demo, photo credit: Liz Chalfin
 Press-n-Peel Demo, Stephanie Gaumond ironing with Liz Bannish observing, photo credit: Liz Chalfin
 Jennifer Grover watching while Audrey Blood measures, photo credit: Liz Chalfin
 Deer Print and plate, image by Donna Stewart from Press-n-Peel process, Press-n-Peel Demo, photo credit: Liz Chalfin
 Press and Peel up close, photo credit: Liz Chalfin
 Liz Chalfin, photo credit: Sheldon Carroll



MARK TO IMPRESS

Maria G. Pisano

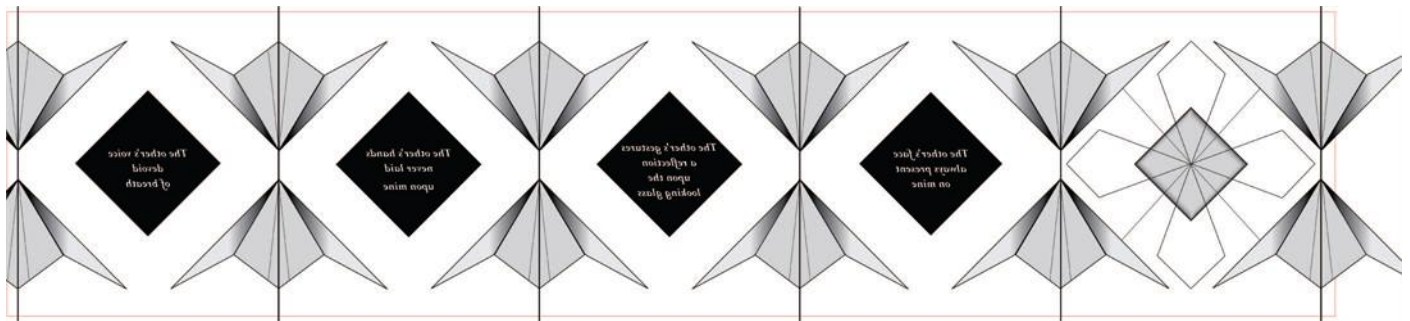
As an artist, my principal mode of expression is through printmaking and the artist book. Artists' books are all encompassing in that they can synthesize the fields of drawing, painting, print and printmaking media, papermaking, typography, book design and many other creative venues. The book format, in its myriad transformative powers, can be used to bring together all other fine arts components into a unique mode of expression. Book arts can combine the old and the new, from papermaking to computers, and can be used across disciplines as an expressive form.

I was trained in traditional intaglio plate making and printing to achieve the rich and subtle tonalities, depth of line and form that the medium offers. Along the way, I was introduced to collagraphs; no longer needing acids or harmful chemicals to create my plates enabled me to continue working in a healthy environment. Collagraphs can be printed both intaglio and relief, and one can achieve very fine detailed lines in the plates. These characteristics served me well in creating images and some larger text. To add 12 point or smaller text to the works over the years I have relied on diverse methods and tools, including polyester plate lithography, cyanotype from mylar output on a laser printer, and text lines cut on hand stamps to print poems and letterpress from polymer plates and handset type.

Relief printing plates have traditionally been engraved and carved with knives, burins and gouges on wood, stone, metals, etc. Creating fine detailed images on these surfaces is extremely difficult and labor intensive. Enter laser engraving, another tool available for creating relief plates, which can transfer a file directly from a computer to the laser bed and burn the design with an intense, pinpoint-sized spot of light or laser energy onto the desired printing plate material.

I prepare these files in Photoshop, InDesign, and/or Illustrator, with the specified requirements: high resolution, bitmap file, the design rendered in black and white and image and text inverted. The text is turned to outlines (vector format), which translates it into an image so that the text and layout chosen by the artist remain true, and will not be substituted if the laser studio does not have that font. The files, sent electronically to the laser studio, are converted once again to a raster image with a chosen resolution that's specifically compatible with the laser's software, and finally the engraved plates can be executed. The black areas of the images are engraved, i.e. removed, on any desired material at a uniform depth, while the white areas of the image remain uncut. It is also possible to have 8-bit grayscale relief engraving plates made where the engraved depth can vary, creating an image that has variable tone gradations when printed as in the accordion *Inverno* libretto.

Colors of Memory was my first artist book for which laser engraved plates were used. The work presents four different environments that echo transformative



experiences: *Primavera*, *Estate*, *Autunno* and *Inverno* include the four books and cherry wood box with laser cut title and design. The accompanying poems resonate with patterns that span one's lifetime alongside the natural patterns of the seasons. Each season is a marker, a passage, beginning with *Primavera*, a time of discovery and self-awareness and ending with *Inverno*, a time of fragility, loss and death. All poems are written by the artist, except *Primavera*, a haiku written by Michael Pisano.

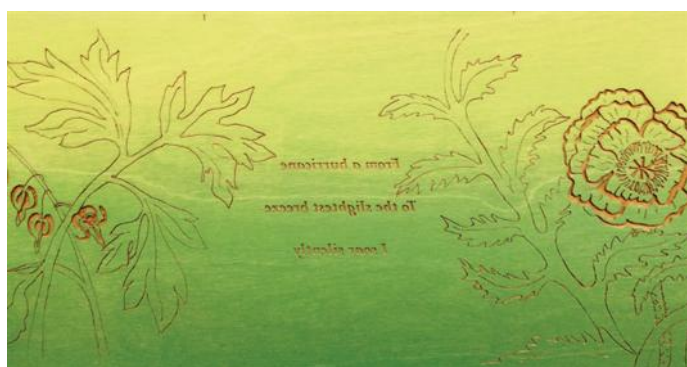
The work is composed of four accordion libretti, which are relief printed from a combination of collagraph plates, wood and acrylic laser engraved plates. The plate for *Primavera*, cherry veneer MDF, has both text and image intaglio engraved, so that the text and image are cut below the printing surface of the plate. The *Estate* plate is relief engraved, so the text and image remain above the plate. The printing of the text worked well in both instances. Both are printed in relief, *Primavera* with a rainbow roll and *Estate* are printed in three colors combining a collagraph plate, a laser engraved plate and pochoir for the pink flowers, all hand printed on a Charles Brand etching press by the artist.

Caudex Folium (2016), my most recent work to use laser cut plates, was inspired by the Callery Pear Survivor Tree and celebrates the return of the tree to the 9-11 Memorial Plaza, after it was nursed back to health and replanted in 2010 between the two memorial pools. Today the tree stands as a symbol of strength, resilience and the indestructible spirit of hope in adversity. The pages are printed intaglio and relief using collagraph and laser cut woodblock plates on an

etching press and the book includes two poems, the story of the tree, pop-up elements and cut stencils, to enrich the work which is printed on diverse papers to enhance its tactile richness. The spine, a print of a tree, expands and symbolically holds the book up. An accordion spine with sewn folios structure and coptic bound wooden covers are used to complete the binding.

The 12.5 point text for the story covering both pages of a folio along with the poems, title and colophon pages showed the laser limitations, necessitating the re-design of the original conception and printing of these plates. Polymer plates can hold fine details such as a period in relief on the plate, but a laser plate cut in relief cannot hold fine independent details, and lacks enough remaining surface to hold the closely cut letters or a fine detailed image. Thus all text and image of the *Survivor Tree* engraved plates were cut intaglio; only the flower pop-up plate image was cut in relief. I had wanted to ink/print only the text on the pages, leaving the background the color of the paper. This, however, was impossible. To break the solid color across the page of text on the story page, I printed and cut a page of tree branches, which, when turned, allowed the story to be read. The title and colophon pages were printed using a stencil that created an image of a tree and can also be read as two human heads, referencing the survivors, around the text, and in the poems page a hand cut stencil of tree branches was printed for the perimeter of the page to highlight the two poems.

Technology, such as my use of laser cut wood and Plexiglass plates to actualize the designs, has added an alternative



approach to creating the surfaces from which I can hand print my pages. I can devote more time on the design, printing and binding of the work. These laser plates are created outside my studio, returning to the old system of collaboration between engraver and artist or printer. The close relationship with Venture Laser, run by Paul Castellana, who was willing to work in adapting my designs and experiment with me to achieve the best prints the laser engraved plates could deliver, was very important in the success of both book ventures.

Having the versatility of multiple methods of plate making and printing, both relief and intaglio, has enlarged artists' vocabulary and given them more flexibility. Artists have many options at their disposal, allowing them to be more experimental in their creative endeavors. Media have evolved giving artists more independence to publish their own work instead of relying on a commercial studio or publisher. This freedom results in a more personal voice in which artists can express themselves and is a testament to the continuous energies artists are bringing to the evolution of the printed page.

Artist Information

Maria G. Pisano is a book artist, printmaker, curator and educator. Memory Press works are represented in The Library of Congress, Carnegie Mellon University, Columbia University, Lafayette College, Wesleyan University and more. In 2017 she had a solo exhibit *Reflections*, alongside numerous group shows here and abroad. Over the years she has curated a number of exhibits, the most recent *Book as Witness: The Artist's Response* at the Center for Book Arts in NYC. Ms. Pisano contributes to book arts publications and has given illustrated lectures at the Library of Congress, College Book Arts Association and the Art Libraries Society of North America. Additionally she continuously gives workshops nationally and internationally, and this year she was invited to present workshops at Bridwell Library, Dallas, TX, Hand Bookbinders of California, Center for Book Arts in NYC and other venues.

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Image Documentation

Colors of Memory, printed from laser, relief and collagraph plates with cherry wood box enclosure, 2014

Inverno libretto, relief print, 29" x 6", 2014

Design workup of *Inverno*, InDesign document, 2014

Primavera libretto, relief printed in a rainbow roll, 29" x 6", 2014



Primavera, detail, intaglio laser engraved plate by Venture Laser, 2014

Caudex Folium, Tree history spread detail, relief printed from wood laser engraved plate with relief printed and hand cut overlay of leaves folio, 20" x 11", 2016

Flower page detail, *Caudex Folium*, relief print with pop-up flower, 20" x 11", 2016

Caudex Folium, relief engraved plate for flower page, 20" x 11", 2016

Gallery Pear Tree plate, *Caudex Folium*, intaglio engraved laser plate from an original photograph by MG Pisano, 20" x 11", 2016

Gallery Pear Tree print, *Caudex Folium*, relief print with rainbow roll using stencil mask for grey lower portion of plate, 20" x 11", 2016





THE VERSATILE SCREENPRINT: HIGH-TECH TOOLS & TRADITIONAL FORMS

Pantea Karimi

Screenprinting in its essence is a marriage of technology (machines and equipment) and tradition (developing imagery through multiple graphic techniques and printing on paper), which makes the medium versatile and suitable for both crisp images and painterly effects. In recent years screenprinters also have used digital applications, which add further complexities and possibilities to the production process. I am a screenprinter with an interest in using the process as a base for creating both multimedia and mixed-media artworks. As an artist, I find screenprinting has inherent qualities that motivate me and stimulate a particular creative thought-process.

In Tehran, between 1992 and 1999, I completed both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in graphic design. In these programs, we took a myriad of courses including drawing, sculpting, dark-room photography and computer graphics. My education in graphic design prepared me for both commercial work and academic research. To complete my Master's Degree at Art University in Tehran, I researched the beginning of the print industry in 19th century Iran, including the first newspapers, which were printed from a stone lithographic process. I gathered reproductions of those newspapers and studied their illustrations, layout and design. I became fascinated by the ways in which text and image complemented one another in novel ways. Print media became increasingly a major source of inspiration, both visually and conceptually.

The technicality of graphic design in general and the combination of new media and traditional courses prepared me for my printmaking career which was set in motion in Hasting College of Arts and Technology in England in 2002. Screenprinting, among other printmaking techniques that I learned, shared a commonality with graphic design and helped me ease into it very quickly. Later, at San Jose State University in California, I got my second master's degree in painting and printmaking with a focus on screenprinting techniques.

My intrigue with creating multi-media works, using screenprint stencils, had begun in England. There, however, I did not have access to a printer, so I began creating my images using collage techniques on paper then copying them onto transparencies using an old-fashioned but high-end copy machine that accepted the transparency substrate. To maximize the image opacity, I cranked up the toner application to the maximum, creating an opaque image that produced a reliable stencil on screen. To create other artworks and to engage my process with the subject matter, a convoluted series of steps were often required.

One approach was to project my transparencies onto the wall, using an overhead projector, incorporating and superimposing texts and other images. I photographed the final compositions from the wall, then scanned the printed photos and used them to create a series of digital poetry books using Adobe Illustrator. I also reproduced the image on paper using monotype, and even on glass using hand-painted fused glass techniques.



I continued this rather convoluted process of art production in the United States. Between 2007 and 2013, the content of my paintings, digital works, and prints were inspired by cultural identity and sociopolitical turmoil around the world including the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring. These events also stirred my exploration into the world of communication technologies and social networking applications and the role they play in the formation of resistance movements. *The Hubbub of Human Magma*, the collaborative 99-second audio-animation I created in 2012, is an example in this vein. Inspired by the 2011 socio-political uprisings in the Middle East and the New York Occupy Movement, which I witnessed in October of that year, I created stencils for a series of screenprinted works. I used my digitized screenprint images and produced a series of watercolors, which became the base for a 99-second animation.

In 2014, I began a new research project which revisited my earlier investigations in the history of Iranian print media. Since then, my work has been an exploration into the pages of medieval and early modern scientific manuscripts, particularly Persian, Arab and European. I am intrigued by the complex expressions of these scientists through scientific illustrations and diagrams. This research project further compelled me to utilize different materials, experiment with novel ways of displaying my work, and employ new technologies. I have been using art installations, screenprints on paper and other substrates, Virtual Reality and video projections to create a dynamic visual interpretation of the scientific concepts and ideas presented in the manuscripts. My research into the

visual representations of medieval and early modern mathematics, medicinal botany, anatomy, optics and cartography is ongoing.

In the beginning of this project, the challenge was how to envision a cohesive body of work with comprehensive scientific subjects and images. To narrow down the process, I began utilizing one of the most prominent characteristics of screenprinting: the simple opaque shape. I converted the manuscripts' texts and diagrams into black silhouettes. Acting as a new visual language, these silhouettes presented the medieval imagery through simplicity and absence of didactic textual information while offering a variety of compositional opportunities for presenting my work. I also drew inspiration from the Russian Suprematist artists El Lissitzky (1890-1941) and Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935). These artists were in search of a style of abstract painting based on geometric shapes, which they believed promoted the supremacy of pure artistic feeling over the depiction of objects. My black shapes also aimed to engage the "pure feelings" of my audiences through simplicity and yet, equally and clearly, they embraced screenprinting as my main medium.

I first screenprinted the shapes on paper, cut them out, and created an installation which I called *Lore*. Later I transformed these shapes into physical objects by digitizing the original shapes and laser-cutting them into black plexiglas. This process led me to use more hi-tech tools in my works. The laser cutter required that I digitize all my screenprinted images and adapt them to the machines' parameters. I saw these images as a completely logical extension of my traditional prints on paper.



For a recent collaborative Virtual Reality project called *Healing Garden*, I reconstructed a medieval medicinal botanical garden after the Alhambra Palace's garden in Andalusia, Spain. Andalusia was the birthplace of *The Herbal of al-Ghafiqi* manuscript, composed by the 12th century Andalusian physician and scholar Abu Ja'far al-Ghafiqi. This manuscript is one of the most remarkable medieval botanical manuscripts on medicinal plants, their names, their illustrations and their healing properties. People, entering the VR environment, take the medicinal plants and arrange them in the plants' beds to create a virtual healing garden. The black silhouettes of the plants are modeled after my screenprinted images on paper. Conceptually, interactivity in the VR installation recalls the interactivity of my production process for the viewer. In this project, the versatility of screenprinting techniques has allowed for different ways of representation and display. I can utilize the computer-generated screenprint stencils repeatedly and in variety of formats. At my recent printmaking Fellowship Residency at Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, California, my work process began by redrawing a few selected plants from *The Herbal of al-Ghafiqi* manuscript. I used a Wacom Pen Tablet to create the herbal plants, which allowed experimenting with a variety of compositions in the Adobe Photoshop program. I tried to keep the rendition of the plants close to the original images and used this process to develop further intimacy with the plants and to re-visualize these ancient drawings. This

procedure recalls the botanists' process. I formed the digital drawings into vertical garden compositions and digitally printed them on long strips of transparent silk organza to create *Folding Gardens* and other components for the installation.

Using technology (laser cut machine) and digital applications has also helped me to start building interactive objects, such as a medieval gadget called the *volvelle*. *Volvelles* are the first paper analog computers, which were made by hand and installed inside the scientific manuscripts to offer different astronomical calculations and to make the manuscripts interactive. The original *volvelles* used circle shapes fastened to a leaf in the center which held various layers in place so that the discs could spin independently. For my Kala exhibition I designed an interactive *Medicinal Herbal Volvelle* that reveals the healing properties of eight medicinal plants. This *volvelle* is partly hand-made and partly laser-cut, with digital printed texts, and screenprinted plants on the aluminum disks. Visitors were invited to interact with this *Medicinal Herbal Volvelle* to learn about the healing properties of eight ancient plants.

In sum, merging my screenprint techniques with a variety of media have continued to enhance my creativity, stimulate my imagination and has made my work process more dynamic. It has simultaneously created new opportunities to also expand my perspective as an artist and to further the interactive character of the art itself.



Artist Information

Pantea Karimi is a painter and printmaker and also holds a professional degree in graphic design. Her work is an exploration into the pages of medieval and early modern scientific manuscripts: Persian, Arab and European. Karimi's works are in both private and public collections and have been exhibited in Iran, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Algeria, Mexico, the UK and the United States.

website: www.panteakarimi.com

Image Documentation

The Hubbub of Human Magma, still image from the 99-second audio-animation, animation by Pantea Karimi and audio by Daniel Konhauser, 2012

Healing Garden, the VR 3-D modeling environment after Alhambra Palace's garden in Andalusia, Spain, concept design by Pantea Karimi, 3-D modeling by Pedram Karimi, VR interaction design by Cyril Zabala, 2017

Folding Gardens, digital prints on silk organza, rods and threads, each strip: 24" x 120"; *Aroma*, bottles, shelves, labels and plants' extracts, 24" x 7" x 8", *Medicinal Herbal Volvele*, silkscreen on hand-cut aluminum, laser cut wood and digital printed text, 24" x 24", installation view at Kala Art Institute Gallery, Berkeley, California, 2017

A visitor interacting with the *Medicinal Herbal Volvele* at Kala Art Gallery, Berkeley, California

Portrait of the Artist, photo credit: Maya Kardum

A Walk in the Garden, printed photograph (projected screenprint transparency and text), 4" x 6", 2004





EXPERIMENTING WITH INNOVATIONS IN PRINTMAKING

An Interview with Beth Fein

How do you see the current state of technology in print media?

I am intrigued by the innovations going on in printmaking. The use of technology expands artistic possibilities as well as making it possible for printmakers to work without using toxic materials or processes. However, new technology is just like a new etching tool or wood carving tool; it is just a new implement. What an artist chooses to do with the technology is the important factor.

Do you have any goals for integrating new technology into your current practice?

I don't specifically have a goal to use technology for its own sake. Rather, I see these techniques as opening creative possibilities. In the last year or two, I have begun to use a direct to plate technology (DTP) for making photopolymer plates that eliminates many of the previous contact issues between the film and plate during exposure. Now I print my image directly onto the polymer plate before exposing. This is definitely a new technique that I will continue to work with. In addition, I have just used laser cutting for the first time to create the sculptural installation of *Speak Truth To Power*. I'm currently experimenting with various ways I can use the same laser technology for printmaking.

What artists inspire you?

There are so many artists that inspire me. I would say that early influences include John Cage and his work with

chance in incorporating unexpected and unplanned events into his art. The playfulness of Calder and Matisse's later work speaks to the artist within me that always wants to play. This playfulness is essential to both my creativity and my art practice. Viola Frey inspired me because she taught me that no idea is too strange or outside the norm to experiment with. William Kentridge (his passion) and Louise Bourgeois both have such diverse bodies of work and are not confined to one medium. Trisha Brown's art contains hidden thoughtfulness that is not always obvious to the audience in her finished work, but involved a deep intricate process. I am also very inspired by many California artists working today: Kaz Watanabe a master printmaker; Heather Wilcoxon whose newest paintings are so passionate and inspiring. There are so many that I could fill the page with them. . .

Are there specific limitations in working with laser cutting?

I have only begun to work with laser cutting and am now experimenting with its possibilities. It is like any technique; you have to first learn the parameters of the technology and then how you can make them meet your needs. This is a question I will have to come back to later when I have more experience.

How do you mesh digital with keeping the "hand of the artist"?

I don't worry that digital technology will change the artistic hand. My prints are often derived from photographs. So for me the use of Photoshop is actually a way for me to enhance my artistic hand. Deconstructing the original

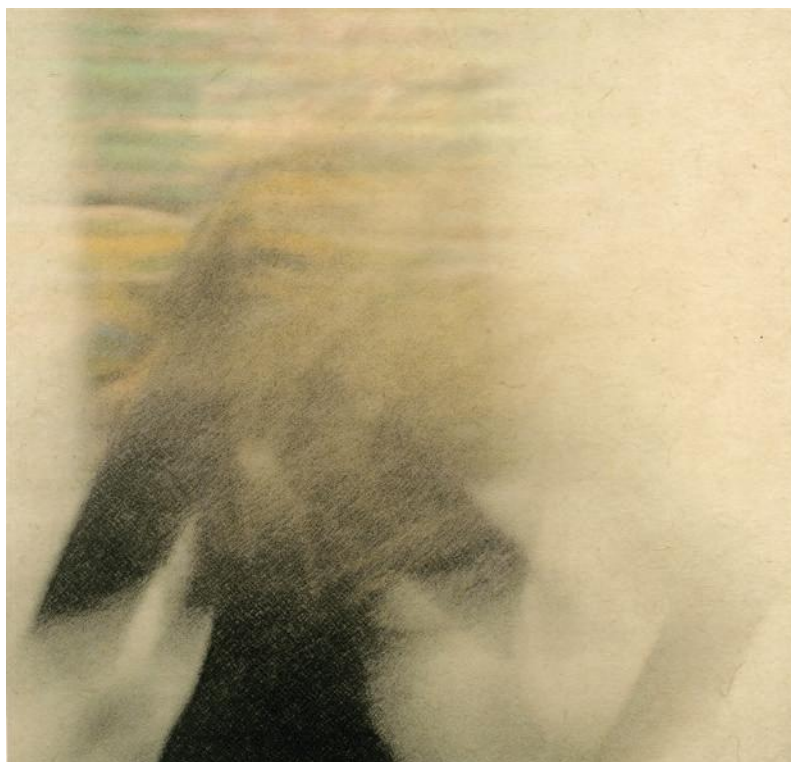


photo and rebuilding an image digitally before bringing it to the physical plate that will produce the final print is just part of my art practice. I can see that becoming too enthralled with digital work could possibly lead one astray, but so far it has just been an asset for my work.

How does your piece *Speak Truth To Power* honor those who speak out?

This work has so much meaning for me. Prior to this installation, I had created a series of prints about personal memories of my family in Argentina during the military dictatorship during which 30,000 people disappeared. During a residency in Buenos Aires at Ace Proyecto, after much research, I combined family memories with memories from those who had the strength and courage to speak out under very dire circumstances. I was and still am intrigued and in awe of those who risked their lives to protest against a dangerous and corrupt government. When I heard Kerry Kennedy give a speech at the Center for Justice and Accountability in San Francisco, she used the phrase, “speak to power.” Those words resonated strongly with me. As her speech was followed by the clients of the Center for Justice and Accountability talking about their experiences from many different locations around the world—of murder, torture and injustice—I began to imagine “speak truth to power” in different languages from people around the globe; unknown to each other, but with the same need for truth and justice. I collected the twenty-three translations in the work from friends and acquaintances to honor those who have stood up and spoken out.

With your series that incorporates digital chine colle’ with etching, how do you merge these two processes, and what was your thought process behind them?

When I first began printmaking, I took a class with Kaz Watanabe where I was introduced to the concept of making digital chine collé for use with an etching plate. I have also used digital chine collé in monotypes. It is a technique for bringing varied elements into the composition. Sometimes the digital aspects may mirror images on the matrix and sometime it can be a completely dissimilar element that can be collaged into the overall composition.

Artist Information

Beth Fein is an interdisciplinary artist whose work encompasses installation, printmaking, video, and performance. Fein now lives in Berkeley and works in her Oakland studio and at Kala Art Institute in Berkeley. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including Transmission Gallery in Oakland; Oakland Museum; International Print Center, NY; Triton Museum of Art; Headlands Center for the Arts; Banks Gallery, London; The San Francisco International Airport; Santander, Spain, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Kala Art Institute. www.bethfein.com

Image Documentation

Self Portrait, photo etching, 4"x4", 2016

Speak Truth To Power (detail), Laser cut wood, 2017, photo credit: Luz Ruiz

Speak Truth To Power, Laser cut wood, 90" x 90" x 54", 2017

Terese’s Poem, photo Solarplate etching, DTP, digital chine collé, Akua inks, 12" x 12" on 22" x 24" paper, 2015



PETER MILTON: GOING FARTHER, GOING DIGITAL

Brian D. Cohen

Marjorie Cohn, Emerita Curator of Prints at the Fogg Art Museum, speculated about what Rembrandt might have done had he known about aquatint (which wasn't invented until right around the time of his death). We won't ever know, as technology doesn't move at the pace we might wish for, even retrospectively. For the consummate engraver Peter Milton, by dint of longevity, the accelerated pace of technology, and above all the single-mindedness of his artistic preoccupations, the right tool did come along. Since 2008, when Peter was already in his 70s, he has used a computer to develop his imagery, but if you ask him, his artistic preoccupations have flowed steadily and consistently for over 50 years, and haven't changed a bit.

Save for this recent kismet of technology, Peter had been pretty much always out of step with what's going on around him. Peter describes being in the Yale MFA program in the late 50s when Abstract Expressionism was in full swing. That movement glorified the broad, autographic gesture writ large. Peter's work from this time nominally acknowledges the graphic language of Abstract Expressionism, though he was not interested in the emotional intensity, existential drama, nor grandiloquent gesture and scale of the dominant idiom. From his early work, Peter showed a predilection for delicate textures, repeated marks, and tiny incidents. One interesting feature of his early prints is the encroachment of what appears to be foul biting, usually unintended surface noise, that Peter

has in fact laid down deliberately to act as an accretion of marks and minute gestures, and which prefigure his future mark-making.

Peter describes his way of working in the 1960s. He would set up a rough collage of documentary photographs from which he drew directly onto the copper plate with lift ground. In *The Garden* this photographic collage served as a model he observed and drew directly from, but did not yet transfer directly to the plate. Later, he began to draw in ink on transparent Mylar instead of directly on the plate, assembling them into different collage layers that he would photographically transfer onto the copper via a light sensitive ground. He created in the Mylar a granular textured field by offsetting a mottled layer of ink onto the film. At this point in the development of his work the trace of his hand all but disappeared, leaving a minute gestural grain, a topographical matrix, throughout most of the plate.

For *The Jolly Corner* series comprised of twenty-one images, Peter developed a method of working from a few large Mylar drawings that he would reconfigure, repeat, and transfer to different positions on different plates. He used this approach for all his subsequent work on copper. He often works within a series, and this appropriation, reassignment, and variation of imagery gives his work a sense of evocation and echo, as well as dislocation, from one print to another. For an artist who can spend as much as a full year developing a single etching, this approach also allowed him to be much more efficient and prolific.

Peter describes himself as a "collage artist," though he says this with some ambivalence. He explains that this



term belies the passion for seamless realization that he nurtures (and also fails to acknowledge the highly developed drawing skills beneath all his work). Underlying the extraordinary control, resolution, and detail of his work in copper is an improvisatory approach of layering, repositioning, echoing, definition, and disappearance. His prints are remarkably erudite, massively psychologically overdetermined, and surprisingly, not very calculated. Recently interviewed by J.R.U. Rotstein, Peter said, “when I begin an image, and even when I’m halfway on the road to finishing it, I have very little sense of how it will end. With luck, something happens, an improbable connection occurs, and magically, everything suddenly makes sense. Leaving open the possibility of the unexpected is exactly where the art in the artist resides.” He roams freely among icons and images from novels, movies, historic transportation, natural phenomena, portraits of celebrated artists (including himself), visual puns, birds, dogs, wolves, dancers, fairies, dirigibles, and characters from film, art, and literature such as Rudolph Valentino, Marcel Proust, Degas, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, Georges de la Tour, and Nijinsky. Peter shows a spiritual kinship to the ideas and iconography of the first decade of the 20th century, and a nearly obsessive relationship with Henry James, whose approach to consciousness, perception, and point of view Peter’s work parallels. Though novelistic, a narrative thread won’t be found in these prints. Time is suspended; scale is recalibrated; he is not driven to further narrative logic, and eschews a settled notion of coherence and order. The fractures, disjunctions, and odd recurrences evoke a sense of playfulness and discovery, along with a

kind of benevolent haunting in which luminous forms (a bird, or a white shirt, gaslight, whisperings of smoke and fog) enter and retreat within architectural space with the unpredictability of subatomic particles. It is working within this sense of unpredictability, and by subverting timing and gravitation and the basic Renaissance premise of viewing one place at one time, that Peter discovers, through iteration after iteration, a logic and connectedness all his own: “I exist in a multiple and random world and the focus of my work is to impose coherence—a sort of logic—on that randomness, all without destroying any underlying sense of the ever-surprising and profoundly unaccountable nature of my, or of anyone else’s, reality. . .” His incongruities and artifices again remind us that he is in control, and that logic is not a given but a construct and a discovery in *Points of Departure II: Nijinsky Variations*, 1996.

Peter surprised me by asserting that he was always willing to make very significant changes even on the copper plate, yet the apparent extraordinary seamlessness of his printed surfaces show none of the changes of mind, the frustrations, the taxing toil or residue of scraping and burnishing a copper plate and resurfacing the metal. To get a sense of the variations of Peter’s prints from state to state, look at his website, www.petermilton.com under Animations. It’s stunning what he was willing to add to and take away from the copper. His insistence on pushing a plate to an unpredicted, unfound, and improvised conclusion caused him to invest so much time and effort into a plate that the work itself began to get tired and Peter frustrated. He began to feel that he had learned all he could. The copper no longer contained mysteries, nor was he wedded for life



to the conceits of the traditional print (the limited edition, the bravura of mastery, the craftsmanship), despite having few, if any, equals in this regard.

In the mid-2000s, some friends suggested that a computer might be a great way to organize his visual material. He took them up on the idea, teaching himself Adobe Photoshop with a little help from a young geek. After a year of frustration and stumbling, in 2008 he produced his first all-digital print, *Finished Sight Lines 1: Tracking Shot*. Peter discovered that the layering approach of Photoshop was the perfect tool to exercise his collaging impulse, extending his former practice of placing and regrouping his drawings on Mylar. Working at 1200 ppi, Peter creates up to 3,000 layers, altering, redrawing, eliminating, and moving imagery much as he'd done in copper. Peter is omnivorous as ever in appropriating imagery, browsing through or scanning from books, the Internet, and his own photographs and earlier drawings and intaglio prints.

Peter prints his computer-developed images both as digital prints on paper and on translucent film called Duratrans for display on LED lightboxes. The latter prints have the enviable ability to produce actual light. For an artist who has worked with the reflected white of printing paper against black ink to create images of unsurpassed luminosity, the enhanced radiance of the backlit prints is astounding.

When we sat down in his studio last summer Peter was digitizing and reworking a series of drawings he had done in the 1980s based on Henry James' *The Aspern Papers*. One especially luminous interior was newly occupied by the figure of Henry James, who broke the frame, defying spatial logic, and went about making sure the whole visual system didn't fall in place too neatly. Peter's wide-ranging imagery, repetition, revisiting, and variation of particular motifs and thematic threads, and his extraordinary concern



for detail are remarkably nourished in his digital work. Carefully controlled harmonics, sly dissonances, and the contrast of crisp edges against dissolving passages still distinguish his work, as these qualities have for over fifty years. Nonetheless things have changed; there is no matrix, no tangible surface to work from, and as such no tactile character to the surface and no depth to the ink especially in unrelieved areas of grey. The disjunctive imagery seems a little too disjointed, as if not every form entirely belongs to the same world. A few things take a little getting used to, such as the availability of different size prints from the same image, which is of course impossible in intaglio.

Beyond the shift to vastly different input and output, digital manipulation, and LED presentation, Peter has contended with the adjustment of the market and the critical response to this work, which has ranged from accusations of betraying tradition to a guarded admiration for learning new tricks at his age. For someone never really in step with the theories and movements in the art world, he is intrigued and maybe a bit surprised by his newfound synergy with today's digital media.

I asked him if he had any nostalgia for working in copper and he said he does miss the intimate touch and earthy physicality of intaglio, and perhaps something of its risk and immediacy. He quickly added that he is engrossed in a new process and all the surprises it offers. Peter then urged me to hold onto my engraving tools, reminding me that young people these days are digitally fluent, but the archaic skills in metal are hard-won and seldom practiced now. As a person who created prints of monumental power, mystery, and distinction from copper plates, he arrived at a place of fatigue and frustration after decades of painstaking and prolonged work. Digital technology renewed his vision, fueled his imagination, and furthered his expression. He has no misgivings about going farther.



Writer's Information

Brian D. Cohen is a printmaker, painter, educator, and writer. In 1989 he founded Bridge Press to further the association and integration of visual image, original text, and book structure. Artist's books and prints by Brian D. Cohen have been shown in over forty individual exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Fresno Art Museum, and in over 200 group shows. Cohen's books and etchings are held by major private and public collections throughout the country. He was first-place winner of major international print competitions in San Diego, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. and the Prix de Print. His essays on the arts and education are a feature of *Art in Print* and *Parenthesis* magazines and the Arts and Culture section of the Huffington Post.

www.bridge-press.com

Image Documentation

Peter Milton with LED lightbox image *En Plein Air*, 34"x 21", 2016, photo credit: Britain Hill

Tracking Shot, copper, 36"x 23", 2008

The Garden, second stage, copper, 24"x 18", 1968

Jolly Corner III:6, copper, 15"x 10", 1971

Nijinsky Variation, First State, copper, 38"x 24", 1996

Nijinsky Variation, copper, 38"x 24", 1996

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